TL3889

NOTE OF THE EPISCOPATE'S PERMANENT COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION OF EAST-TIMOR

1. In view of the news which have been arriving with more frequency from East-Timor, the portuguese episcopate can but express in a public document, its deepest and most profound solidarity towards the people of this martyr land, victim of a tragedy befallen on her nine years ago and which, unfortunately lasts till the present day.

In the root of this tragedy which amounts to many thousands of deaths, is a series of very serious mistakes made by all the parts concerned. Nevertheless it is not our purpose to analyse how far go responsibilities of each of them : to do such would be pointless and even untimely because for us the best way to contribute to the quick end of so much suffering is not to touch open wounds or to revive half dead hatred. Our single purpose is to state that East-Timor's people pain is shared by the Church.

2. Although implications of other nature could be enumerated it is misleading to think that, behind the sad happenings in Timor, there isn't a strong national feeling that can't stand being put down or anihilated.

Timor looks forward to give free expression to its own individuality and to prevent it is not only a physical genocide but a cultural one as well and this last one more serious than the first, because it attains those who die and the survivors, not only the present generation but those to come as well.

3. In Timor's drama, the portuguese Church feels somewhat involved because of the historic responsibility (though indirectly) she had in the outburst of its national conscience. Actually, our missionaries arrived at Timor more than a century before the first official governor sent by the Portuguese Crown. That is why when he arrived there he found all local aristocracy christianized and the rest of the people undergoing the same process. Portuguese culture was then vastly spread , absorbed and melted with local tradition, and was already an important element of Timor's people colective heritage, well accepted because it was not imposed but freely assimilated.

In such a far, poor, rough and laking material means land , the chuch built, from the XVI century on schools,seminaries, convents

in which the local population could receive the christian message and also all other forms of human knowledge,freely. If due to the dissolution of religious orders in 1834 such work was not accomplished as expected, one mustn't forget that , simultaneously, the missionaries introduced in Timor products, instruments and agricultural techniques that enabled the Tiomr population to improve their food and econoic level and their laterial wellfare.

Of this we might perhaps rejoice. But we'd rather rejoice by the faithfulness to God shown by all those Timor brothers who, by suffering, have shared Christ's passion and are thus undenyable witnesses of the fact that, among them, the Godspell seed has not fallen in arid land.

4. The Church sure of the divine sanction that goes with its specific mission and at the same time sure of the human authority acquired thoughout its historical activity in Timor, can and must make its voice herd so as to put an end to the wrongs done to Timor people and that it may , by itself, decide about its future in peace and freedom.

That is why, while exposing the odious exploitation some try to draw from the sufferings of the Timor people with ideological propaganda aims, we at the same time greet all the true efforts of the Holy See, in its continuous activity to ease the population and in the defenceof its human and religious rights.

We appeal to the portuguese government , to which such task is still historically, morally and lawfully still ascribed, to the indonesian government, the occupying potency, to international institutions that might act as mediators, and to Timor political leaders, in their homeland or in exile, to engage themselves to put an quick and lasting end to such a painful situation, that is becoming everlasting. Though the legitim interests of each part have to be safeguarded, it has to be assured to Timor people its continuity as an historical entity, in what regards itself and in what concerns the neighbouring countries.

Finally we exort the faithful to supplicate God's comfort and mercy to all those that, in Timor, in one way or the other, still have to endure suffering.

Lisbon, 28th. March, 1984